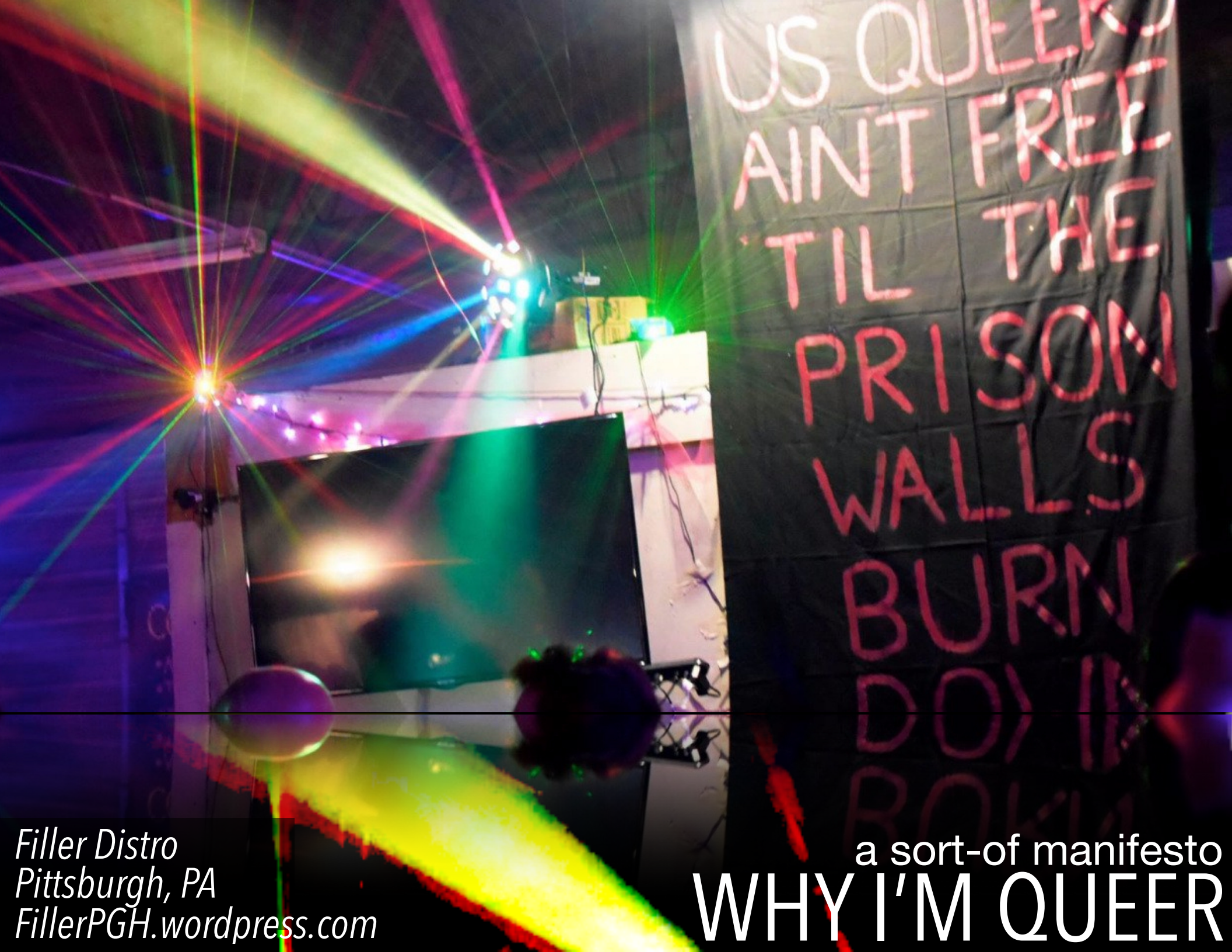

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a sort-of manifesto

WHY I'M QUEER

Some Background:

This manifesto originated as a final project for a Queer Theory course at the University of Pittsburgh. As a student in their Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies Program I've been fortunate and privileged to work towards an education that aligns with my identity and politics. Rather than writing a more "traditional" analytic paper for the course, I decided to stay true to my roots as a punk and a leftist by writing a manifesto which I've replicated in zine form, and you are now holding in your hands, with the hopes that in distribution I might be able to say shit that I think needs said.

When I tell people that I'm a Gender Studies major, I'm typically met with shock, confusion, or a mixture of the two. One thing that I've been told by some of my fellow queers is that they don't see the use in taking any courses like queer theory due either their own personal knowledge or the inaccessibility of the literature. Which is why I decided to go with this manifesto as an idea.

I pulled a lot of ideas in my formatting and methods in writing from the anonymously written "Queers Read This" which was initially distributed by queers at a New York pride march in 1990. In echoing that zine, I'm hoping to provoke some thoughts about what it means to be queer. To echo one of the most well known slogans of second-wave feminism, "The personal is political," I think of my queerness of being both of these things. So if you decide to give this a read I hope I gave you something to think about, whether you agree or disagree with what I've written.

Stay Queer, Stay Punk,

Thomas

3.2, 1991 pp. iii-xviii

Duggan, Lisa. "The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism."

Materializing Democracy, edited by Russ Castronovo, Dana D. Nelson, Duke University

Press, May 2002, pp. 175-194

Werner, Michael. "Introduction." *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory,*

Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2003, pp. vii-xxxi

onto every individual. I choose queerness not because straights don't like who I fuck. I choose queerness because of straights who insist that my choice should lead to my marginalization and oppression.

I am queer because I choose to recognize the history of oppression against my queer siblings. As long as there are forces who are inflicting harm on me and my queer siblings, whether it be through physical violence, suppression of my identity, or restrictions on my rights, I will fight as a queer. I will fight alongside the other queers who refuse to be subjugated by these forces. My queerness is an opposition to the normal so that as we look towards the future, we can see a world where we won't need to exist in opposition.

Works Cited

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Politics?" *GLQ,* vol. 3, 1997 pp. 437-465

de Lauretis, Teresa. "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Studies, An Introduction." *differences,* vol

Intro:

What is queer? For most of my life I just thought it was another identity that people identified with. In a world where there seemed to be a word for everything in the ever-expansive LGBTQIA+ acronym, I just assumed it was another way to say you're not straight or cisgender. I knew a lot of punks liked to call themselves queer, so I thought it was just something that became trendy and didn't think of anything of it. For all I knew, queer was just the new name for the LGBT righst movement. A lot of other people seemed to think so at least. But then I started to notice a trend in the people I saw using queer. It wasn't just an identity, but rather a way of thinking. There was a whole politics to the world of queerness that I've slowly been exposed to. As I've immersed myself in this kind of political queerness, I've been able to come to new conclusions on what it means to be queer.

The anonymous writers of *Queers Read This* state "Being queer is not about a right to privacy; it is about the freedom to be public, to just be who we are" (2). We live in a heteronormative society. No matter who you are, the default in the eyes of society is heterosexual. We "come out" to tell everyone that we weren't born the default. To be queer is to fight this. To be queer is to lay a claim to the rights and privleges that we aren't granted because we aren't the "normal."

What's Queer's goal?

The goal of queer isn't to just conform to a society where your existence is allowed. With government policies like "Don't ask, don't tell" you can see how society

hates queers. It's ok to be gay as long as you don't let people know! You can fuck in private! And even then, queers were only given the right to fuck fairly recently. In the United States, by the time the Supreme Court ruled on gay sex in 2003 there were fourteen states where it was illegal! To be queer is to acknowledge this struggle. "Every time we fuck, we win" (2). Fucking is a radical action becauste it shows we are not constrained by a heteronormative society. Every time we fuck, we win because we're fighting for the rights that straight people have. We're fighting for the rights that straight people take for granted.

Queerness is a fight not just for the ability to fuck in private. Straight people can flaunt their sexuality all they want. They'll do whatever they want and they don't even know they're doing it. The only time that we can feel safe is when we make our own spaces for it. Free from the eyes of straight people. But queerness is our way to say "Fuck that!" When queers make out in public we're carving our own place in society. Why is it that straight people are allowed to do so but if we so much as kiss our partners we can face violence? But that's not to say that queerness only fights for the right to fuck.

Queer is more than just rights about where you can fuck and who you can tell about it. It's a movement that is open and sympathetic to more than just the gays. Queerness benefits all marginalized people. Queers fight against all oppressive institutions. Queerness is for those shunned and stigmatized by society.

Why Queer?

The question on the minds of many people is "Why do we use queer?" Queer can unify everyone who is marginalized by society. We can unite in our sameness, our gay is superior to being straight. It's not an issue of who you fuck, it's an issue of how you are treated because of it.

Cohen states "The radical potential of those of those on the outside of heteronormativity rests in our understanding that we need not base our politics in the dissolution of all categories and communities, but we need instead to work toward the destabilization of and the remaking of our identities" (481). The issue with the categories we create like straight, gay, lesbian, cisgender, transgender, is now the differences that exist between them. The issue is the power relations that form between them. Queers hate straights not because they're heterosexual, but because of the power that they have over us queers. Queerness holds a radical potential that can allow us to eliminate these power relations.

In Conclusion:

Queer is not a word that is easily definable. Depending on the context in which it is used, and who is using it, queer can be seen as a revolutionary ideology, or an insult that is thrown around in day to day life. Despite this vagueness, I still firmly hold onto my queerness and hope others will do the same. I hope that queers are able to not only unify under this identity, but also that we are able to use it for the radical potential that it holds.

The queerness that I choose to claim is one that aims to destroy power relationships by fighting against the normal. It is the ideology which I believe has the power to destabilize and destroy concepts of heteronormativity. I do not hate straights because of who they choose to fuck. I hate straights because they impose these thoughts

So far it may just seem like I'm documenting my own anger and frustrations. And it's true to an extent. I am angry at the culture which leads to queers like myself getting murdered for existing. I am choosing to hold onto and acknowledge this anger in a way that I feel is rational. It's an anger that comes from looking back on history and the sadness that comes from knowing that we live in a society that continually harms us. I hope that others feel the same emotions I do. I don't wish to push a fatalistic view of a queer future that ends in our inevitable deaths. I want this sadness and anger, that both I and other queers hold, to let us look into a future where we can exist. Not just so we can be tolerated, but so we can exist as individuals who are allowed to express our queerness without fear of repercussions, whether that be from individuals or society at large.

What do Queers Want?

This is the question which Michael Warner asks in his introduction to *Fear of a Queer Planet*. He argues "The preference for "queer" represents, among other things, an aggressive impulse of generalization; it rejects a minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political interest-representation in favor of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal" (vi). In this sense, queerness is not just a just a challenge to heterosexuality. It is a challenge to the "normal."

Queerness is radical not because it is a way for us to say how much we hate straight people. Queerness is radical because it allows us to look at the systems in place and critique those systems. To be queer is to state one's dissatisfaction with the now. When asking the question "What do queers want?" the answer is not to prove how being queerness. While it may not be a word that fits everyone's taste, it allows us to subvert the expectations of a straight society. In this society, we are queer and we need to remind everyone of it. But that doesn't mean we're only queer for the sake of the straights. It allows us to look beyond the differences we have from our queer siblings. When you walk down the street or sit down on the bus and see someone who's wearing a jacket that says "queer" you'll know that they're your ally.

Fuck Your Binaries:

In Teresa de Lauretis' introduction to *Queer Theory: Lesbian & Gay Studies*, she states "The term "queer," juxtaposed to the "lesbian and gay" of the subtitle, is intended to mark a certain critical distance from the latter, by now established and convenient formula" (iv). The term "lesbian and gay" implies an intrinsic difference between the two categories. And while both identities are unique, it is hard to ignore the focus that's been happening on the Gay. Gay as a term implies masculinity, and is not adequate to define all the experiences that women and non-binary individuals may face.

Queerness isn't supposed to recreate binaries that we need to live in. I can understand the desire for terms like "Lesbian" or "Gay." Queerness doesn't need these words in order to unite us. If you're gay, then you can unite with lesbians through your shared queerness. And if you're a lesbian, you can unite with the gays through your shared queerness. And it will unite everyone who feels as though those terms don't fit their experiences. Queerness also has room for the bisexuals, pansexuals, or anyone else who may feel like their sexuality needs to be defined in those terms.

Queer, but not Gay:

The enemy of queerness is not just heteronormativity, but also homonormativity. To define what this means, I'd like to look towards Lisa Dugan who compares it to neoliberalism in her piece "The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism" stating that it's "...a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (179). Neoliberalism aims to not just accept individuals for their gender or sexuality, but to homogenize these experiences in a way that will not challenge the values and views of a heteronormative society. A gay politics does not necessarily means a queer politics.

Queerness needs to fight against homonormative institutions. We should not have to depoliticize our identities just to exist in a culture. We should not just exist in a state of being tolerated. As long as there is a dominant heterosexual culture we are engaged in a day to day battle for our own autonomy. We need to center our queerness on what we want for ourselves and not what others want for us.

If to be queer is to be political then we must fight against the nonpolitics of neoliberalism and homonormativity. Doing so is to give into a movement that still wishes to suppress identity in the name of tolerance. "Don't ask, don't tell" is the epitome of this kind of rhetoric. Ignoring the politics of even participating in the military service, policies like this serve to remove the queerness from the gays. Actions such as these are proof that straights have no interest in legitimate queer rights. They claim that it's an act of tolerance to allow gay individuals to serve in the military, but if you let them know you're gay then you're out. "We get the marriage and the military then we go home to cook for dinner" (Duggan 189).

Should we Hate Straights?

In case the tone so far has been unclear, a queer politics is inherently critical of a heteronormative society. But that does mean we need to say "Fuck all the Straights?" Some of us have friends and family who are unfortunately straight, but that does not mean they are our inherent enemy. As stated earlier, one of the benefits of queerness and why queer is helpful is because of how it is able to unite groups based on their sameness.

Cathy J. Cohen in "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens" states "...a queer politics which demonizes all heterosexuals discounts the relationships-especially those based on shared experiences of marginalization-between gays and straights" (450). While queers are marginalized, that does not mean all straights are our oppressors. That isn't to say that anybody who is for our causes can just call themselves "queer" because they're with us. We should not force ourselves to hate all straights.

To form a monolithic understanding of heterosexuality is to fall into the same trappings that straights use to oppress us. So queers need to be there for those who heteronormativity has left behind. While the straights may hate queers, they also hate single mothers or teen mothers. They hate "lower-class individuals" many of which are people of color. Even if these groups have members who are "heterosexual" that does not mean that they are oppressing us in the way that the straights are.

What's in our Future?